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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA AND PRM; PLEASE PASS TO USAID
SAN JOSE FOR USAID/OFDA GUY LAWSON

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SUBJECT: CARE IRAQ PROGRAM DIRECTOR: MAINTENANCE OF FOOD
RATIONS AND ELECTRICAL INFRASTRUCTURE KEY; LARGE POPULATION
MOVEMENTS UNLIKELY

Classified By: DCM Greg Berry, per 1.5 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: According to CARE Iraq Country Director Margaret Hassan (protect), the Iraqi population is "entirely dependent" on the OFF food ration system and has no economic resources to draw upon if the OFF pipeline is interrupted. Hassan also cautioned that Iraq's water/sanitation system and hence public health standards are entirely dependent on electricity. Hassan advised that Iraq has a well-trained population that is fully capable of running a sophisticated infrastructure and humanitarian services network; NGOs seeking to provide services inside Iraq should play a supporting rather than supplanting role. Hassan expects that very few Iraqis or TCNs would seek to leave Iraq in the event of a crisis, as Iraqis would either stay at home or seek refuge outside urban areas and most TCNs are well-integrated in Iraqi society and no more likely to flee than any other group. End summary.

12. (C) CARE Iraq Country Director Margaret Hassan, a dual British-Iraqi national who has lived in Iraq for the last twenty years (please protect source) briefed PRM and USAID/OFDA officers and regional refcoord February 3 on current humanitarian conditions inside Iraq. Hassan was in Amman en route between meetings in New York and Beirut, and was accompanied by CARE regional emergency coordinator Graham Miller. With sixty employees, CARE is the largest international NGO working in central/southern Iraq. The Iraq program is run by CARE UK.

Iraqi Population Impoverished, Dependent on OFF Rations

13. (C) Hassan reported that, after 12 years of sanctions, the population of Iraq is "entirely dependent" on the UN's food ration system. Any military action that would disrupt the food ration system would be a "complete disaster" as Iraqi citizens have no economic resources to fall back on in a crisis. To illustrate her point, Hassan recounted a recent visit to the home of an Iraqi schoolteacher in Basra. The teacher, who earns roughly seven U.S. dollars per month, had sold all of his belongings in order to augment his income. Hassan said the teacher had nothing -- not even a chair to offer his guest -- in his home. When Hassan asked the teacher how he and his family would cope if his food rations were disrupted, he said the family would have no choice but to go hungry. Hassan added that although the Iraqi government was now distributing two and sometimes even three months' of food rations in advance, the poorest Iraqis often sell those rations in order to buy basic household commodities.

14. (C) In addition, Hassan reported that the food ration system has distorted Iraq's natural economy. Because the government-run OFF system brings into Iraq certain imported foods, local Iraqi merchants no longer are purchasing their own stocks of rice and flour. Hassan therefore fears that if the OFF pipeline is disrupted, even Iraqis with money would not be able access certain types of food.

Sophisticated Infrastructure Dependent on Electricity

15. (C) Hassan emphasized that Iraq is an urban society, entirely dependent on electricity for its wat/san and health sectors. If Iraq's electrical system is disrupted, it will not be able to maintain its extensive water purification systems. CARE's programs in Iraq have focused largely on improving public health by improving water quality; it works in "all" of Iraq's water treatment plants and hospitals. (NOTE: Refcoord passed humanitarian mapping instructions to Hassan; we do not know whether CARE has submitted any information on its Iraq programs or installations.)

16. (C) Hassan also emphasized that Iraq has a large, well-organized and well-trained network of skilled professionals who are able to run the country's existing infrastructure in all sectors but especially in health and water and sanitation. Any NGOs seeking to provide services

in post-conflict Iraq should be prepared to play a supporting, rather than supplanting role in these areas.

Large Population Displacements Unlikely

17. (C) Hassan expects that few Iraqis would seek refuge outside Iraq in the event of hostilities. Noting that the Iraqi population has endured difficult conditions since the 1990-91 Gulf War, she predicted that most Iraqis will either hunker down in their homes or seek refuge with friends or families outside urban centers. Hassan also predicted that many of the one million Iraqis already internally displaced (some from the Iran-Iraq war, others from 1991) would remain in their current locations in the event of hostilities. Most of these "displaced" Iraqis, Hassan said, are now permanently relocated and have no intention of returning to their previous residences.

18. (C) Hassan also expects that very few Egyptians or Palestinians resident in Iraq would try to leave Iraq in the event of hostilities. Although there were three million Egyptian laborers resident in Iraq before the 1990-91 crisis, Hassan believes that there are now less than 100,000 Egyptians resident in Iraq. Of that population, most are very integrated into Iraqi society and unlikely to flee. Similarly, Hassan characterized the Palestinian population in Iraq as "very well integrated" and no more likely to flee Iraq than any other group. She cautioned, however, that Palestinians resident in Iraq do not hold Iraqi citizenship and would most likely show up at borders without any documentation if they fled Iraq.

GNEHM